

Residents support grade separations; \$64M budget stretches ADOT thin

By Zach Colick, Independent Newspapers

Nov. 11, 2007

Hundreds packed the Fairway Recreation Center auditorium Nov. 7, asking questions of transportation officials concerning whether progress can be made to expedite possible grade separations along Grand Avenue.

With plans to widen Grand Avenue in early 2009, residents have said they are seeking either overpasses or underpasses at 103rd and 107th avenues as traffic volumes continue to augment, which residents believe increases risk of injury or death crossing the busy arterial.

Despite residents calling on the Arizona Department of Transportation to advance construction of underpasses or overpasses, officials said it is ultimately the Maricopa Association of Government's decision concerning prioritization of projects in phase two, beginning in 2011.

ADOT spokesman Tim Tate noted throughout the meeting they would like to grant all residents' wishes concerning safely crossing Grand Avenue, but said they are stretched thin with a \$64 million budget.

"Grand is a challenge today and will be in the future from the perspective of residents and other Valley motorists," he said. "We are trying to stretch our dollars as far as we can."

Resident Don Schordje asked ADOT officials whether they have asked for federal funding for the widening project and noted it should be looked into before the project begins.

"Whether we qualify for federal funding remains to be seen," Mr. Tate said.

Grand Avenue connects several West Valley communities, including Sun City, Sun City West, Sun City Grand, El Mirage, Youngtown and Peoria.

Mike Delleo, ADOT senior project manager, said 40,800 vehicles travel this stretch of Grand Avenue daily and that number is expected to jump to 57,100 by 2025.

He also noted 3.7 million people reside in metropolitan Phoenix and that number is expected to soar to 5.7 million by 2025.

Mr. Tate, who presented a PowerPoint presentation concerning the Regional Transportation Plan, said the focus of last week's meeting was to gauge interest from residents concerning projects slated for phase two of the plan that would begin in 2011.

As part of a Valley-wide program of improvements, the Grand Avenue widening project would create a continuous six-lane arterial road by 2010. Work is expected to begin sometime in 2009.

Total cost for the project is estimated at \$15.8 million, with funds coming from a half-cent sales tax authorized by Maricopa County voters with the passage of Proposition 400 in November 2004.

Phase two, which would run from 2011 to 2016, may include potential grade separations, intersection improvements, and frontage road and drainage system improvements.

Often-traveled intersections in Sun City West, including Meeker Boulevard and Reems Road, have been mentioned in talks for possible grade separations.

Depending on available funding, additional left-hand turn lanes, pedestrian waiting areas and push buttons in medians to prompt a signal change may also be part of the expansion design.

Resident Ron McCabe is a newcomer to Sun City and said he would hate to see Grand Avenue expanded to three lanes in each direction, but “you can’t stop progress.”

“It’s a shame it has to happen, but it’s inevitable” he said.

Whether by foot, bicycle or wheelchair, Mr. McCabe said traffic signals along Grand Avenue at 103rd and 107th avenues are not coordinated to get elderly residents across the road safely.

Recreation Centers of Sun City officials said they also have a vested interest in expanding Grand Avenue as residents’ access to recreation centers north and south of Grand can be deterred by heavy traffic.

RCSC Board Treasurer Norm Dickson said “there is no way” ADOT can widen Grand Avenue and not implement underpasses or overpasses to accommodate people to safely cross.

“The corporation functions in the best interests for its members,” he said.

Mr. Dickson noted ADOT officials should delay the project altogether if widening the roadway to six lanes and implementing underpasses or overpasses cannot be done congruently.

While some may argue ADOT is not listening to residents’ concerns with the possibility of grade separations not imminent for at least another four years, Mr. Dickson explained the community played a key role in 2004 when a decision was made not to widen Peoria Avenue.

Resident Sue Painter, who spearheaded the effort three years ago, said she hopes to have similar success with a petition to implement grade separations along Grand Avenue.

So far, Ms. Painter said she has received “numerous signatures” from officials representing condominium associations, the Sun City Home Owners Association, the RCSC and clubs.

Visit azdot.gov/valleyfreeways and click Grand Avenue.